

from *The Autobiography* Benjamin Franklin

Leaving Boston

At length, a fresh difference arising between my brother and me, I took upon me to assert my freedom, presuming that he would not venture to produce the new indentures. It was not fair in me to take this advantage,



Benjamin Franklin.
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and this I therefore reckon one of the first errata¹ of my life; but the unfairness of it weighed little with me, when under the impressions of resentment for the blows his passion too often urged him to be-

bly in my brother's case, it was likely I might, if I stayed, soon bring myself into scrapes; and farther, that my indiscreet disputations about religion began to make me pointed at with horror by good people as an infidel or atheist. I determined on the point, but my father now siding with my brother, I was sensible that, if I attempted to go openly, means would be used to prevent me. My friend Collins, therefore, undertook to manage a little for me. He agreed with the captain of a New York sloop for my passage, under the notion of my being a young acquaintance of his, that had got a naughty girl with child, whose friends would compel me to marry

I wished to live without committing any fault at any time.

stow upon me, though he was otherwise not an ill-natured man: Perhaps I was too saucy and provoking.

When he found I would leave him, he took care to prevent my getting employment in any other printing house of the town, by going round and speaking to every master, who accordingly refused to give me work. I then thought of going to New York, as the nearest place where there was a printer; and I was rather inclined to leave Boston when I reflected that I had already made myself a little obnoxious to the governing party, and, from the arbitrary proceedings of the Assem-

her, and therefore I could not appear or come away publicly. So I sold some of my books to raise a little money, was taken on board privately, and as we had a fair wind, in three days I found myself in New York, near 300 miles from home, a boy of but 17, without the least recommendation to, or knowledge of any person in the place, and with very little money in my pocket.

WORDS TO OWN

assert (ə·sɜrt') v.: to declare; claim.

arbitrary (är'bə·trer'ē) adj.: based on whims or individual preferences.

indiscreet (in'di·skrēt') adj.: careless in speech or action.

1. **errata** (er·rät'ə): Latin for "errors"; a printer's term.

My inclinations for the sea were by this time worn out, or I might now have gratified them. But, having a trade, and supposing myself a pretty good workman, I offered my service to the printer in the place, old Mr. William Bradford,² who had been the first printer in Pennsylvania, but removed from thence upon the quarrel of George Keith. He could give me no employment, having little to do, and help enough already; but says he, "My son at Philadelphia has lately lost his principal hand,³ Aquila Rose, by death; if you go thither, I believe he may employ you." Philadelphia was 100 miles further; I set out, however, in a boat for Amboy,⁴ leaving my chest and things to follow me round by sea.

In crossing the bay, we met with a squall that tore our rotten sails to pieces, prevented our getting into the Kill,⁵ and drove us upon Long Island. In our way, a drunken Dutchman, who was a passenger too, fell overboard; when he was sinking, I reached through the water to his shock pate,⁶ and drew him up, so that we got him in again. His ducking sobered him a little, and he went to sleep, taking first out of his pocket a book, which he desired I would dry for him. It proved to be my old favorite author, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*,⁷ in Dutch, finely printed on good paper, with copper cuts,⁸ a

2. **William Bradford**: one of the first American printers; not to be confused with *Of Plymouth Plantation* author William Bradford (page 26). Bradford (1663–1752) set up the first printing presses in Philadelphia (1685) and New York (1693).

3. **principal hand**: best employee.

4. **Amboy**: Perth Amboy, New Jersey.

5. **Kill**: channel (from the Dutch *kill*). Based on the explorations of Henry Hudson in 1609, the Dutch claimed land in the Middle Colonies and gave Dutch names to some of its geographic features.

6. **shock pate** (pāt): shaggy head.

7. ***Pilgrim's Progress***: religious allegory by the Puritan writer John Bunyan (1628–1688), first published in 1678. It tells how the hero, Christian, makes his journey to salvation. Notice that Franklin admires the book for literary and historical, rather than religious, reasons.

8. **copper cuts**: engravings.

dress better than I had ever seen it wear in its own language. I have since found that it has been translated into most of the languages of Europe, and suppose it has been more generally read than any other book, except perhaps the Bible. Honest John was the first that I know of who mixed narration and dialogue; a method of writing very engaging to the reader, who in the most interesting parts finds himself, as it were, brought into the company and present at the discourse. . . .

When we drew near the island, we found it was at a place where there could be no landing, there being a great surf on the stony beach. So we dropped anchor, and swung round toward the shore. Some people came down to the water edge and hallooed to us, as we did to them; but the wind was so high, and the surf so loud, that we could not hear so as to understand each other. There were canoes on the shore, and we made signs, and hallooed that they should fetch us; but they either did not understand us, or thought it impracticable, so they went away, and night coming on, we had no remedy but to wait till the wind should abate; and, in the meantime, the boatman and I concluded to sleep, if we could; and so crowded into the scuttle,⁹ with the Dutchman, who was still wet, and the spray beating over the head of our boat, leaked through to us, so that we were soon almost as wet as he. In this manner we lay all night, with very little rest; but, the wind abating the next day, we made a shift to reach Amboy before night, having been thirty hours on the water, without victuals,¹⁰ or any drink but a bottle of filthy rum, and the water we sailed on being salt.

9. **scuttle**: covered opening in hull or deck of a ship.

10. **victuals** (vit' lz): food; sometimes spelled "vittles."

WORDS TO OWN

abate (ə·bāt') v.: lessen.

In the evening I found myself very feverish, and went in to bed; but, having read somewhere that cold water drank plentifully was good for a fever, I followed the prescription, sweat plentiful most of the night, my fever left me, and in the morning, crossing the ferry, I proceeded on my journey on foot, having fifty miles to Burlington,¹¹ where I was told I should find boats that would carry me the rest of the way to Philadelphia.

It rained very hard all the day; I was thoroughly soaked, and by noon a good deal tired; so I stopped at a poor inn, where I stayed all night, beginning now to wish that I had never left home. I cut so miserable a figure, too, that I found, by the questions asked me, I was suspected to be some runaway servant, and in danger of being taken up on that suspicion. However, I proceeded the next day, and got in the evening to an



*Speak not but what may
benefit others or yourself;
avoid trifling conversation.*

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inn, within eight or ten miles of Burlington, kept by one Dr. Brown. He entered into conversation with me while I took some refreshment, and, finding I had read a little, became very sociable and friendly. Our acquaintance continued as long as he lived. He had been, I imagine, an itinerant doctor, for there was no town in England, or country in Europe, of which he could not give a very particular account. He had some letters,¹² and was ingenious, but much of an unbeliever, and wickedly undertook, some years after, to travesty the Bible in doggerel verse, as Cot-

11. **Burlington:** Burlington, New Jersey; about eighteen miles from Philadelphia.

12. **letters:** education.

ton had done Virgil.¹³ By this means he set many of the facts in a very ridiculous light, and might have hurt weak minds if his work had been published; but it never was.

At his house I lay that night, and the next morning reached Burlington, but had the mortification to find that the regular boats were gone a little before my coming, and no other expected to go before Tuesday, this being Saturday; wherefore I returned to an old woman in the town, of whom I had bought gingerbread to eat on the water, and asked her advice. She invited me to lodge at her house till a passage by water should offer; and being tired with my foot traveling, I accepted the invitation. She understanding I was a printer, would have had me stay at that town and follow my business, being ignorant of the stock necessary to begin with. She was very hospitable, gave me a dinner

of oxcheek with great goodwill, accepting only of a pot of ale in return; and I thought myself fixed till Tuesday should come. However, walking in the evening by the side of the river, a boat came by, which I found was going toward Philadelphia, with several people in her. They took me in, and, as there was no wind, we rowed all the way; and about midnight, not

having yet seen the city, some of the company were confident we must have passed it, and would row no farther; the others knew not where we were; so we put toward the shore, got into a creek, landed near an old fence, with the rails of which we made a fire, the night being cold, in October, and

13. **doggerel . . . Virgil:** Doggerel is irregularly constructed comical verse, often used for satirical purposes. In 1664, Charles Cotton (1630-1687) published a doggerel version, or a parody, of the *Aeneid*, an epic poem by the Roman poet Virgil (70-19 B.C.).

WORDS TO OWN

itinerant (ī·tin'ər·ənt) *adj.*: traveling.

LITERATURE AND SCIENCE

Time on His Side: Benjamin Banneker

Poor Richard's Almanack (page 95) was a best-seller in its time, but Benjamin Franklin is not the only important figure in the history of the American almanac. Between 1792 and 1797, six remarkable almanacs were published by Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806), a Maryland farmer, astronomer, mathematician, and the only African American ever to have calculated almanacs. Banneker's almanacs, published in twenty-eight editions, were among the most successful almanacs of his era.

Self-taught scientist . . . Benjamin Banneker was the son of free African Americans. His grandmother was an Englishwoman, and his grandfather, who claimed to be an African prince, had the name Bannke or Bannaka. His grandmother taught him to read and write, and for a while he attended a one-room, interracial school where, recalled an African American classmate, "all his delight was to dive into his books." Banneker was mostly self-taught, and throughout his life he acquired considerable computational skill. For enjoyment he devised mathematical puzzles, some of them in verse. At twenty-two, using only a borrowed pocket watch and a picture of a clock as models, Banneker built a functioning wooden clock, each gear carved by hand, which struck the hours for over fifty years. Later in life, Banneker developed a passionate interest in the stars, and, in 1788, he calculated a solar eclipse using nothing but books as a guide.

there we remained till daylight. Then one of the company knew the place to be Cooper's Creek, a little above Philadelphia, which we saw as soon as we got out of the creek, and arrived there about eight or nine o'clock on the Sunday morning, and landed at the Market Street wharf.

Arrival in Philadelphia

I have been the more particular in this description of my journey, and shall be so of my first entry into that city, that you may in your mind compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made there. I was in my working dress, my best clothes being to come round by sea. I was dirty from my journey; my pockets were stuffed out with shirts and stockings, and I knew no soul nor where to look for lodging. I was fatigued with travel-

ing, rowing, and want of rest, I was very hungry; and my whole stock of cash consisted of a Dutch dollar, and about a shilling in copper. The latter I gave the people of the boat for my passage, who at first refused it, on account of my rowing; but I insisted on their taking it. A man being sometimes more generous when he has but a little money than when he has plenty, perhaps through fear of being thought to have but little.

Then I walked up the street, gazing about till near the market house I met a boy with bread. I had made many a meal on bread, and, inquiring where he got it, I went immediately to the baker's he directed me to, in Second Street, and asked for biscuit, intending such as we had in Boston; but they, it seems, were not made in Philadelphia. Then I asked for a three-penny loaf, and was told

Banneker published his almanacs to advance not only the cause of science, but also the cause of African Americans. In 1791, Banneker sent a manuscript copy of his first almanac to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, along with a famous letter in which he urges Jefferson to recognize the equality of all people and calls for the abolition of slavery. Jefferson in turn sent the almanac to the Academy of Sciences in Paris, the foremost body of scientific learning in France. Thus, Banneker achieved transatlantic fame through his almanacs, as Franklin did through his writings and diplomatic career.

... and star-gazing sage. Banneker was described by those who knew him as having the thoughtful demeanor of a sage as he leaned on the long staff that he always carried with him. Toward the end of his life, living alone in a small log house on his farm, Banneker continued to watch the stars, putter in his garden, study bees and locusts, play the violin and flute, and record his observations in a journal that became a unique record of an eighteenth-century almanac maker's method. His lifelong preoccupation with the measurement of time assured him a prominent place in the early history of science in America. Appropriately, the wooden clock Banneker had constructed kept excellent time until two days after his death: As Banneker's body was being lowered into his grave, his house a few yards away caught fire, destroying the clock he had made more than fifty years before.



Benjamin Banneker, from one of his almanacs, c. 1795, by an unknown artist. Woodcut.

Maryland Historical Society.

they had none such. So not considering or knowing the difference of money, and the greater cheapness nor the names of his bread, I bade him give me three-penny

worth of any sort. He gave me, accordingly, three great puffy rolls. I was surprised at the quantity, but took it, and,



Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.

having no room in my pockets, walked off with a roll under each arm, and eating the other. Thus I went up Market Street as far as Fourth Street, passing by the door of Mr.

Read, my future wife's father; when she, standing at the door, saw me, and thought I made, as I certainly did, a most awkward, ridiculous appearance. Then I turned and went down Chestnut Street and part of Walnut Street, eating my roll all the way, and, coming round, found myself again at Market Street wharf, near the boat I came in, to which I went for a draft of the river water; and, being filled with one of my rolls, gave the other two to a woman and her child that came down the river in the boat with us, and were waiting to go farther.

Thus refreshed, I walked again up the street, which by this time had many clean-dressed people in it, who were all walking the same way. I joined them, and thereby was led into the great meetinghouse of the

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Quakers near the market. I sat down among them, and, after looking round awhile and hearing nothing said, being very drowsy through labor and want of rest the preceding night, I fell fast asleep, and continued so till the meeting broke up, when one was kind enough to rouse me. This was, therefore, the first house I was in, or slept in, in Philadelphia. . . .

Arriving at Moral Perfection

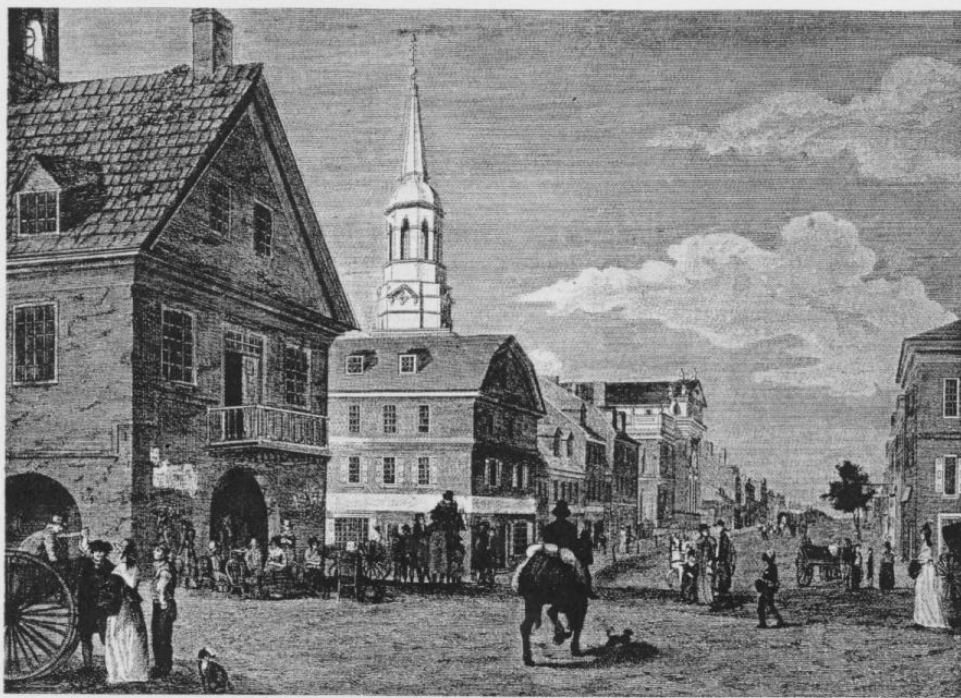
It was about this time I conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wished to live without committing any fault at any time; I would conquer all that either natural inclination, custom, or company might lead me into. As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other. But I soon found I

had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined. While my care was employed in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another; habit took the advantage of inattention; inclination was sometimes too strong for reason. I concluded, at length, that the mere speculative conviction that it was our interest to be completely virtuous, was not sufficient to prevent our slipping; and that the contrary habits must be broken, and good ones acquired and established, before we can have any dependence on a steady, uniform rectitude of conduct. For this purpose I therefore contrived the following method.

WORDS TO OWN

arduous (är'jōō·əs) *adj.*: difficult.

rectitude (rek'tə·tōōd') *n.*: correctness.



Second Street, North from Market Street, with Christ Church, Philadelphia (1799) by W. Birch & Son. Colored line engraving.

The Granger Collection, New York.

In the various enumerations of the moral virtues I had met with in my reading, I found the catalog more or less numerous, as different writers included more or fewer ideas under the same name. Temperance, for example, was by some confined to eating and drinking, while by others it was extended to mean the moderating every other pleasure, appetite, inclination, or passion, bodily or mental, even to our avarice and ambition. I proposed to myself, for the sake of clearness, to use rather more names, with fewer ideas annexed to each, than a few names with more ideas; and I included under thirteen names of virtues all that at that time occurred to me as necessary or desirable, and annexed to each a short precept, which fully expressed the extent I gave to its meaning.

These names of virtues, with their precepts, were:

1. *Temperance*. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. *Silence*. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3. *Order*. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4. *Resolution*. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5. *Fragility*. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
6. *Industry*. Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7. *Sincerity*. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
8. *Justice*. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
9. *Moderation*. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

10. *Cleanliness*. Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.
11. *Tranquility*. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
12. *Chastity*. Rarely use venery¹⁴ but for health or offspring, never to dalliance, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.
13. *Humility*. Imitate Jesus and Socrates.¹⁵

My intention being to acquire the *habitude* of all these virtues, I judged it would be well not to distract my attention by attempting the whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time; and, when I should be master of that, then to proceed to another, and so on, till I should have gone through the thirteen; and, as the previous acquisition of some might facilitate the acquisition of certain others, I arranged them with that view, as they stand above. *Temperance* first, as it tends to procure that coolness and clearness of head, which is so necessary where constant vigilance was to be kept up, and guard maintained against the unremitting attraction of ancient habits, and the force of perpetual temptations. This being acquired and established, *silence* would be more easy; and my desire being to gain knowledge at the same time that I improved in virtue, and considering that in conversation it was obtained rather by the use of the ears than of the tongue, and therefore wishing to break a habit I was getting into of prattling, punning, and joking, which only made me acceptable to trifling company, I gave *silence*

14. *venery* (ven'ər·ē): sex.

15. *Socrates* (sāk'rō·tēz') (470-399 B.C.): Greek philosopher. He is said to have lived a simple, virtuous life.

WORDS TO OWN

facilitate (fə·sil'ə·tāt') v.: simplify.

the second place. This and the next, *order*; I expected would allow me more time for attending to my project and my studies. *Resolution*, once become habitual, would keep me firm in my endeavors to obtain all the subsequent virtues; *frugality* and *industry* freeing me from my remaining debt, and producing affluence and independence, would make more easy the practice of *sincerity* and *justice*, etc., etc. Conceiving then, that, agreeably to the advice of Pythagoras¹⁶ in his Golden Verses, daily examination would be necessary, I contrived the following method for conducting that examination.

I made a little book, in which I allotted a page for each of the virtues. I ruled each page with red ink, so as to have seven columns, one for each day of the week, marking each column with a letter for the day. I crossed these columns with thirteen red lines, marking the beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the virtues, on which line, and in its proper column, I might mark, by a little black spot, every fault I found upon examination to have been committed respecting that virtue upon that day.

I determined to give a week's strict attention to each of the virtues successively. Thus, in the first week, my great guard was to avoid every¹⁷ the least offense against *temperance*, leaving the other virtues to their ordinary chance, only marking every evening the faults of the day. Thus, if in the first week I could keep my first line, marked T, clear of spots, I supposed the habit of that virtue so much strengthened, and its opposite weakened, that I might venture extending my attention to include the next, and for the following week keep both lines clear of spots. Proceeding thus to the last, I could go through a course complete in thirteen weeks, and four courses in a year. And like him who, having a garden to weed, does not attempt to eradicate all the bad herbs at

16. Pythagoras (pi-thag'ə-rās): Greek philosopher and mathematician of the sixth century B.C.

17. every: archaic for "even."

Form of the Pages

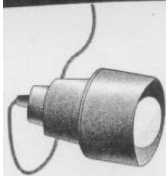
Temperance							
Eat not to dallness. Drink not to elevation.							
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once, which would exceed his reach and his strength, but works on one of the beds at a time, and, having accomplished the first, proceeds to a second, so I should have, I hoped, the encouraging pleasure of seeing on my pages the progress I made in virtue, by clearing successively my lines of their spots, till in the end, by a number of courses, I should be happy in viewing a clean book, after a thirteen weeks' daily examination. . . .

WORDS TO OWN

subsequent (sub'si-kwənt) *adj.*: following.

eradicate (i-rad'i-kāt') *v.*: to eliminate.



SPOTLIGHT ON

Sayings of Poor Richard

Poor Richard's Almanack was Franklin's biggest publishing success, and it continued to appear for over twenty-five years. Every house had an almanac. Almanacs calculated the tides and the phases of the moon, claimed to forecast the weather for the next year, and even provided astrological advice for those who believed in it. Many almanacs also supplied recipes, jokes, and **aphorisms**. "Poor Richard" was an imaginary astrologer, who had a critical wife named Bridget. One year Bridget wrote the maxims, to answer those her husband had written the year before on female idleness. Once, Bridget included "better" weather forecasts so that women would know the good days for drying their clothes.



The Granger Collection, New York.

Panel from an engraving for Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard Illustrated* (c. 1800).

Franklin took Poor Richard's wit and wisdom where he found it—from old sayings in other languages, from other writers, and from popular adages. He never hesitated to rework the texts to suit his own purposes. For example, for the 1758 almanac, Franklin skimmed all his previous editions to compose a single speech on economy. This speech, called "The Way to Wealth," has become one of the best known of Franklin's works. It has been mistakenly believed to be representative of Poor Richard's wisdom. Poor Richard often called for prudence and thrift, but he just as often favored extravagance.

1. Love your neighbor; yet don't pull down your hedge.
2. If a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.
3. Three may keep a secret if two of them are dead.
4. Tart words make no friends; a spoonful of honey will catch more flies than a gallon of vinegar.
5. Glass, china, and reputation are easily cracked and never well mended.
6. Fish and visitors smell in three days.
7. He that lieth down with dogs shall rise up with fleas.
8. One today is worth two to-morrows.
9. A truly great man will neither trample on a worm nor sneak to an emperor.
10. A little neglect may breed mischief; for want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse the rider was lost; for want of the rider the battle was lost.
11. If you would know the value of money, go and try to borrow some; he that goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing.
12. He that composes himself is wiser than he that composes books.
13. He that is of the opinion that money will do everything may well be suspected of doing everything for money.
14. If a man could have half his wishes, he would double his troubles.
15. 'Tis hard for an empty bag to stand upright.
16. A small leak will sink a great ship.
17. A plowman on his legs is higher than a gentleman on his knees.
18. Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterward.
19. Nothing brings more pain than too much pleasure; nothing more bondage than too much liberty.